History of Perth, Western Australia To year 1900

History of Perth, Western Australia

Perth is the capital city of Western Australia. It was established by Britain as the Swan River Colony in 1829. The area had been explored by Europeans as early as 1697, and occupied by the Indigenous Whadjuk Noongar people for millennia.

Perth was established by Captain James Stirling in 1829 as the administrative centre of the Swan River Colony. It gained city status (currently vested in the smaller City of Perth) in 1856 and was promoted to the status of a Lord Mayorality in 1929. The city inherited its name due to the influence of Sir George Murray, then Member of Parliament for Perthshire and Secretary of State for War and the Colonies.

Perth has been shaped by successive periods of mineral resource-led economic expansion and population growth commencing with the gold rush of the 1890s. Since at least 1966 Perth's growth rate has been continuously higher than the national average.

Aboriginal history

Before the founding of the Swan River Colony, the indigenous Noongar people were well established in the southwest corner of Western Australia, hunting and gathering. They called the area on which Perth now stands Boorloo. Boorloo formed part of Mooro, the tribal lands of Yellagonga, whose group was one of several based around the Swan River, known collectively as the Whadjuk. Like elsewhere in Australia, Aboriginal occupation of the coastal plain created conditions attractive to European settlement.

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In many cases colonial settlements and homesteads were located on grounds which Aboriginal people had cultivated with native vegetation cropping and cleared with fire whilst road alignments often followed Aboriginal tracks through the bush.

The lakes on the coastal plain were particularly important to the Aboriginal people, providing them with both spiritual and physical sustenance. The swamps to the north of the river provided food, meeting places, shelter, and familiar hunting grounds. Fish, turtles, oysters, crabs, birds and their eggs, frogs, edible roots, fungi, kangaroos and possums abounded. The waters were fringed with tea-tree, grass trees and paper bark, the last providing shelter. The large flat spaces of the swamp flood plains created natural amphitheatres for ceremonies and camping.

From 1831, there were hostile encounters between settlers and Noongars that culminated in several executions and massacres that lead to the disintegration of the tribes and their retreat to the swamps and lakes north of the river. These were known to them as Boodjamooling, and became their main campsites and gathering places following dispossession from traditional lands.

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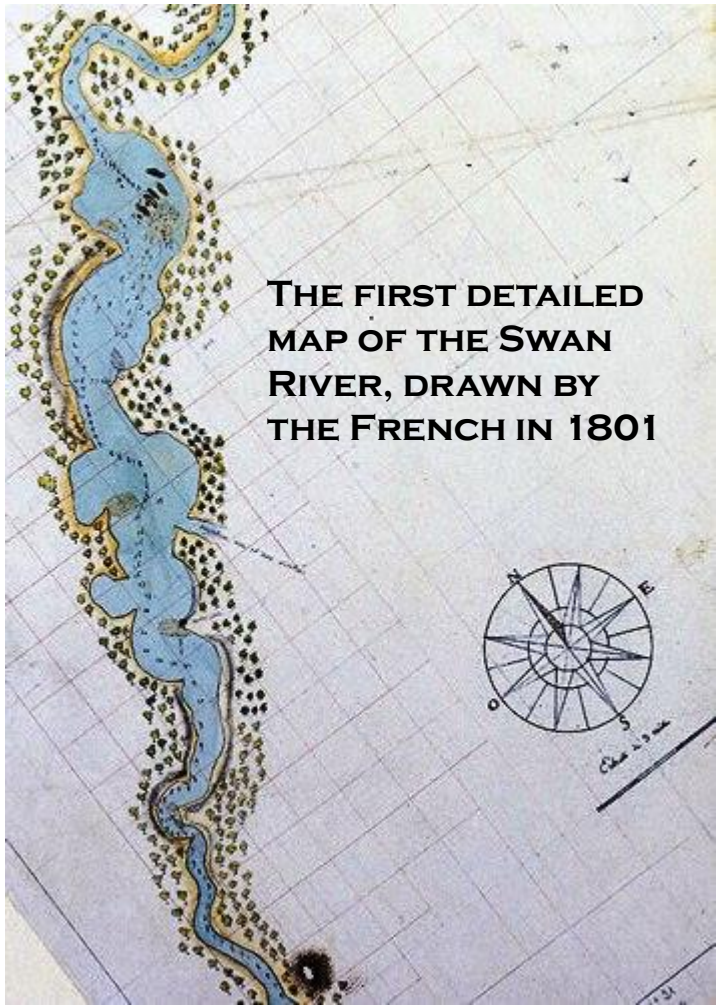
Early European exploration

Early European exploration of the area commenced in 1697 with the discovery of the Swan River by Dutch captain Willem de Vlamingh. A sloop was dragged over the limestone bar and sandy shoals that blocked the river mouth, and an expedition made up the river. Surveying the area from "high ground" (Mount Eliza), Vlamingh was not impressed. Similar explorations by the French in 1801, and the British in 1822 left equally unfavourable impressions regarding any potential settlement of the area.

The first explorer to gain a favourable opinion of the Swan River was Captain James Stirling, who explored the area in March 1827. With relatives in the powerful British East India Company, Stirling was predisposed to the idea of a West Australian colony with potential for Indian Ocean trade.



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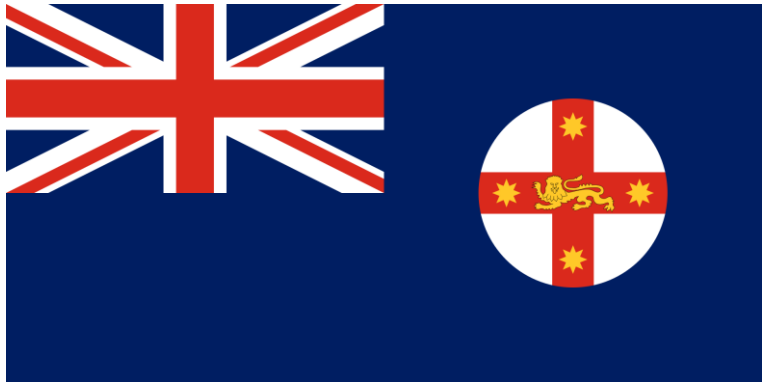
With Frederick Garling and the botanist Charles Fraser, Stirling spent 12 days exploring the river, travelling as far upstream as the Ellen Brook junction. The party did not go far enough ashore to see that sandy soil characterised much of the land around the river. As a result, their favourable impressions of the quality of the soil was highly inaccurate, but became instrumental in the decision to establish the Swan River Colony.

In his reports to the Home Office, Stirling acknowledged that previous explorations had found the area "sterile, forbidding and inhospitable" but argued that he had found it superior to New South Wales even, and promoted in glowing terms the agricultural potential of the area. His lobbying was for the establishment of a free settlement, unlike the other penal settlements at New South Wales, Port Arthur and Norfolk Island.

Persuaded that the proposed colony would incur no significant cost on the part of the British Government, and perhaps fuelled by rumours that the French were about to establish a penal colony in the western part of Australia, the Colonial Office assented to the proposal in mid-October 1828.

Ellen Brook near Millhouse Road bridge in Belhus, July 2021



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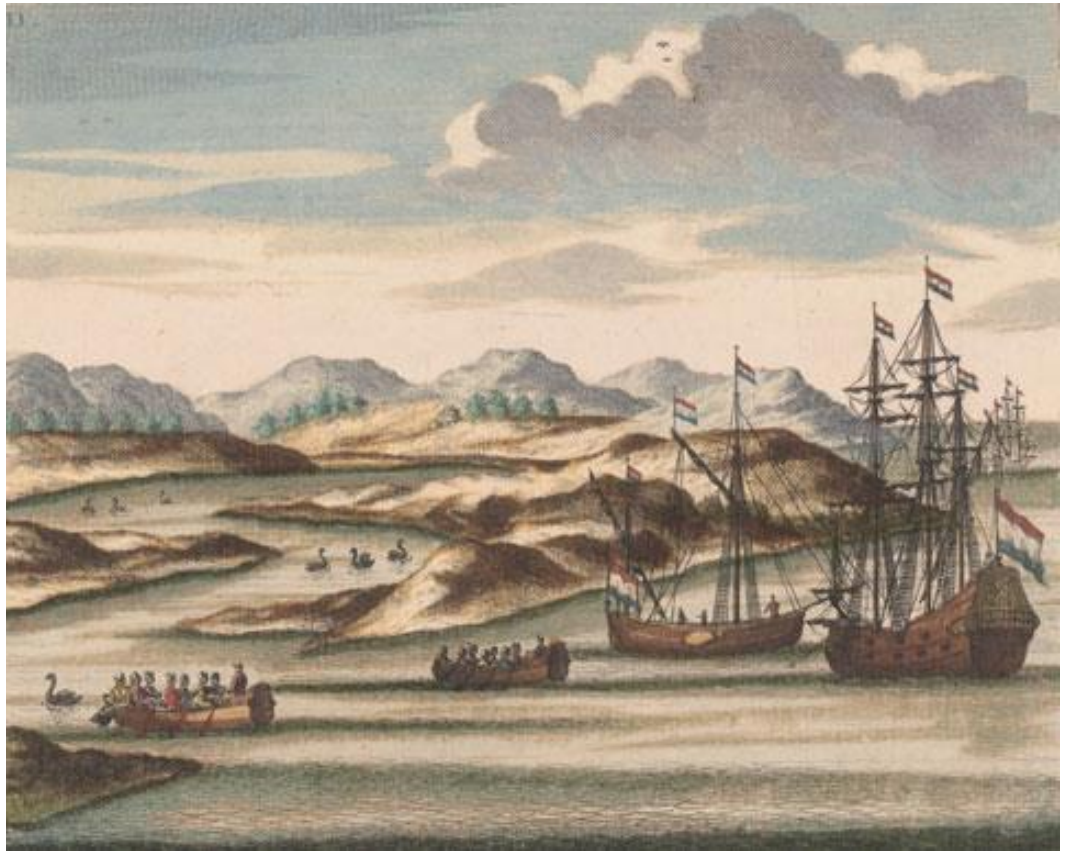
Founding of the Swan River Colony (1829)

The Swan River Colony, also known as the Swan River Settlement, or just Swan River, was a British colony established in 1829 on the Swan River, in Western Australia. This initial settlement place on the Swan River was soon named Perth, and it became the capital city of Western Australia.



The name was a pars pro toto for Western Australia. On 6 February 1832, the colony was renamed the Colony of Western Australia,[3][4] when the colony's founding lieutenant-governor, Captain James Stirling, belatedly received his commission. However, the name Swan River Colony remained in informal use for many years. The first recorded Europeans to sight land where the city of Perth is now located were Dutch sailors. Most likely the first visitor to the Swan River area was Frederick de Houtman on 19 July 1619, travelling on the ships Dordrecht and Amsterdam.

Willem de Vlamingh's ships, with black swans, at the entrance to the Swan River, Western Australia, coloured engraving (1796), derived from an earlier drawing (now lost) from the de Vlamingh expeditions of 1696–97

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His records indicate he first reached the Western Australian coast at latitude 32°20', which is approximately at Warnbro Sound.[5] He did not land because of heavy surf, and so proceeded northwards without much investigation.

On 28 April 1656, Vergulde Draeck en route to Batavia (now Jakarta) was shipwrecked 107 km (66 mi) north of the Swan River near Ledge Point. Of the 193 on board, only 75 made it to shore. A small boat that survived the wreckage then sailed to Batavia for help, but a subsequent search party found none of the survivors. The wreck was rediscovered in 1963.

In 1658, three Dutch Republic ships, also partially searching for Vergulde Draeck visited the area. Waekende Boey under Captain S. Volckertszoon, Elburg under Captain J. Peereboom and Emeloort under Captain A. Joncke sighted Rottnest but did not proceed any closer to the mainland because of the many reefs. They then travelled north and subsequently found the wreck of Vergulde Draeck (but still no survivors). They gave an unfavourable opinion of the area partly due to the dangerous reefs.

The Dutch captain Willem de Vlamingh was the next European in the area. Commanding three ships, Geelvinck, Nijptangh and Weseltje, he arrived at and named Rottnest on 29 December 1696, and on 10 January 1697 visited and named the Swan River. His ships could not sail up the river because of a sand bar at its mouth, so he sent out a sloop which even then required some dragging over the sand bar. His ships could not sail up the river because of a sand bar at its mouth, so he sent out a sloop which even then required some dragging over the sand bar. Vlamingh was also not impressed with the area, and this was probably the reason for a lack of Dutch exploration from then on.

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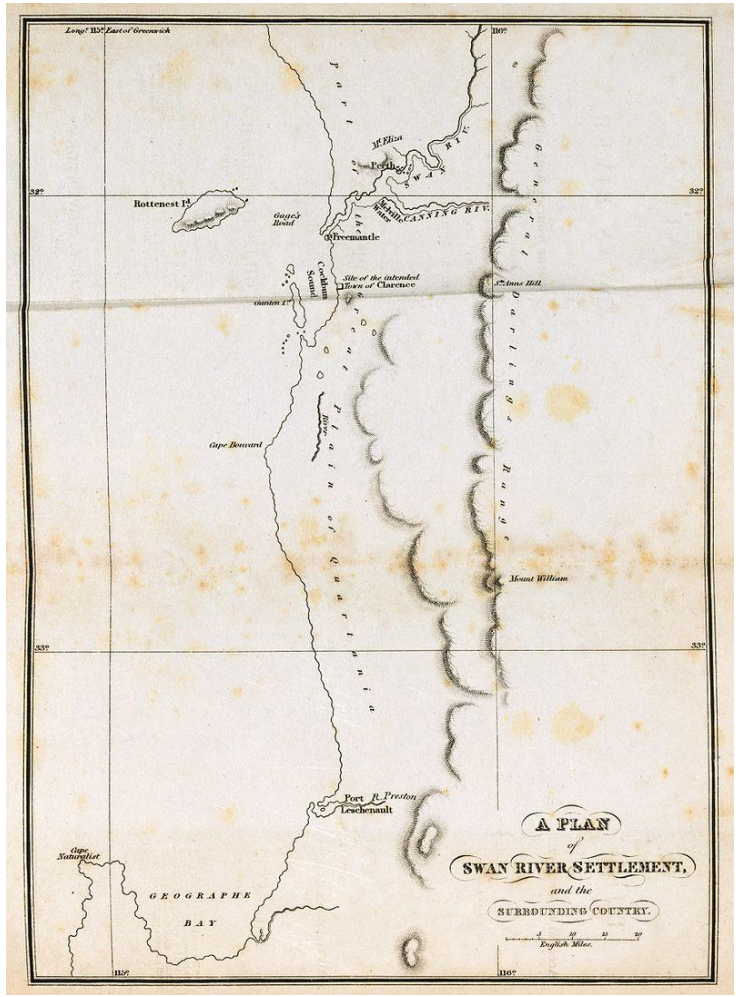
In 1801, the French ships Géographe captained by Nicolas Baudin and Naturaliste captained by Emmanuel Hamelin visited the area from the south. While Géographe continued northwards, Naturaliste remained for a few weeks. A small expedition dragged longboats over the sand bar and explored the Swan River. They also gave unfavourable descriptions regarding any potential settlement due to many mud flats upstream and the sand bar (the sand bar wasn't removed until the 1890s when C. Y. O'Connor built Fremantle harbour).

Later in March 1803, Géographe, with another ship Casuarina, passed by Rottnest on their way eventually back to France, but did not stop longer than a day or two.
The next visit to the area was the first Australian-born maritime explorer, Phillip Parker King in 1822 on Bathurst. King was also the son of former Governor Philip Gidley King of New South Wales. However, King also was not impressed with the area.



The Swan River Settlement and the surrounding country (1831)

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The founding father of Western Australia was Captain James Stirling who, in 1827, explored the Swan River area in HMS Success which first anchored off Rottnest, and later in Cockburn Sound. He was accompanied by Charles Fraser, the New South Wales botanist.

Their initial exploration began on 8 March in a cutter and gig with parties continuing on foot from 13 March. In late March, Success moved to Sydney, arriving there on 15 April. Stirling arrived back in England in July 1828, promoting in glowing terms the agricultural potential of the area. His lobbying was for the establishment of a free settlement – unlike penal colonies at New South Wales, Port Arthur and Norfolk Island – in the Swan River area with himself as its governor. As a result of these reports, and a rumour in London that the French were about to establish a penal colony in the western part of Australia, possibly at Shark Bay, the Colonial Office assented to the proposal in mid-October 1828.

In December 1828, a Secretary of State for Colonies despatch reserved land for the Crown, as well as for the clergy, and for education, and specified that water frontage was to be rationed. The most cursory exploration had preceded the British decision to found a settlement at the Swan River; the most makeshift arrangements were to govern its initial establishment and the granting of land; and the most sketchy surveys were to be made before the grants were actually occupied.

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A set of regulations were worked out for distributing land to settlers based on land grants. Negotiations for a privately run settlement were also started with a consortium of four gentlemen headed by Potter McQueen, a member of Parliament who had already acquired a large tract of land in New South Wales. The consortium withdrew after the Colonial Office refused to give it preference over independent settlers in selecting land, but one member, Thomas Peel, accepted the terms and proceeded alone. Peel was allocated 200,000 hectares (500,000 acres), conditional on his arrival at the settlement before 1 November 1829 with 400 settlers. Peel arrived after this date with only 300 settlers, but was still granted 100,000 hectares (250,000 acres).

Events of the settlement

The first ship to reach the Swan River was HMS Challenger. After she anchored off Garden Island on 25 April 1829 and then in Cockburn Sound on 27 April, Captain Charles Fremantle declared the Swan River Colony for Britain on 2 May.

Parmelia arrived in Cockburn Sound on 2 June carrying Stirling and his party, and HMS Sulphur arrived on 8 June carrying members of the 63rd Regiment and families. Three merchant ships arrived shortly after: Calista on 5 August, St Leonard on 6 August and Marquis of Anglesea on 23 August. A series of accidents followed the arrivals which probably nearly caused the abandonment of the expedition. Challenger and Sulphur both struck rocks while entering Cockburn Sound and were fortunate to escape with only minor damage. Parmelia however, under Stirling's "over confident pilotage", also ran aground, lost her rudder and damaged her keel, which necessitated extensive repairs. With winter now set in, the settlers were obliged to land on Garden Island.

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Bad weather and the required repairs meant that Stirling did not manage to reach the mainland until 18 June, and the remaining settlers on Parmelia finally arrived in early August. In early September a major disaster occurred: Marquis of Anglesea was driven ashore during a gale and wrecked beyond repair. The ship did not break up, as had been expected, but instead survived to become Western Australia's first prison hulk.

The first reports of the new colony arrived back in England in late January 1830. They described the poor conditions and the starving state of the colonists, deemed the land totally unfit for agriculture, and reported (incorrectly) that the settlers had abandoned the colony. As a result of these reports, many people cancelled their migration plans or diverted to Cape Town in South Africa, or to the more well-established New South Wales colony.

Nevertheless, a few settlers arrived and additional stores were dispatched. By 1832 the population of the colony had reached about 1,500. Aboriginal people were not counted at that time, but in the south west have been estimated to number 15,000. The difficulty of clearing land to grow crops was so great that by 1850 the population of settlers had increased only to 5,886. This population had settled mainly around the southwestern coastline at Bunbury, Augusta and Albany.

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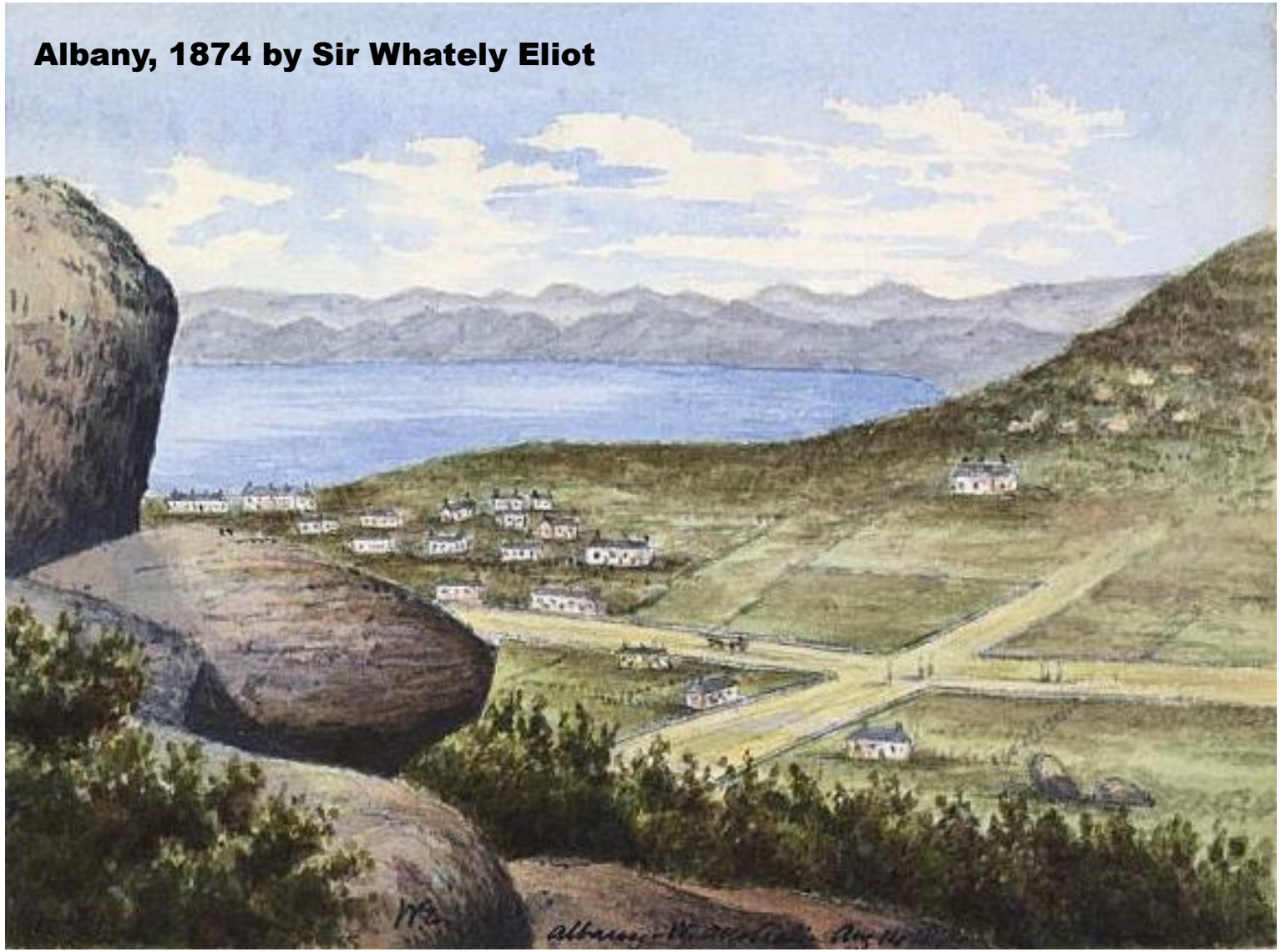
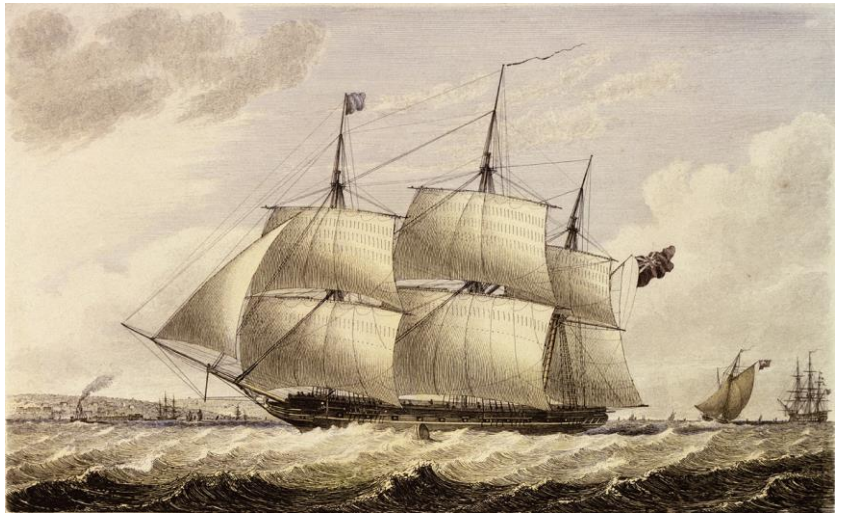


Albany, 1874 by Sir Whately Eliot



The Challenger commanded by Captain FitzClarence, sailing from Portsmouth with Dispatches for Lisbon, Oct 31. 1827 Coloured etching and engraving of The Challenger (1826). Under the command of Charles Fremantle, she was in part responsible for the creation of the colony of Swan River in 1829. Challenger was wrecked off Mocha Island, Chile on 19 May 1835.

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Amity was a 148-ton brig used in several notable voyages of exploration and settlement in Australia in the early nineteenth century.

She was built in New Brunswick in 1816 and for some years was used as a merchant vessel trading between America and Britain before being brought to Australia in 1824.

On 22 September 1829 Amity arrived at Fremantle from Singapore with passengers and crew totalling 15 people. She was the eighth shipping arrival in the fledgling Swan River Colony. By 1844 the vessel was involved in the transport of cattle from Port Albert in Victoria across Bass Strait to Hobart in Tasmania. Amity was wrecked after running aground on an uncharted sandbar now called Vansittart Shoals (40°16'S 148°25'E) near Vansittart Island, north of Van Diemen's Land (later Tasmania) on 18 June 1845

The full-sized, land-mounted replica is now part of the Museum of the Great Southern, part of the Stirling Historical Precinct on Princess Royal Drive, Albany, overlooking Princess Royal Harbour.

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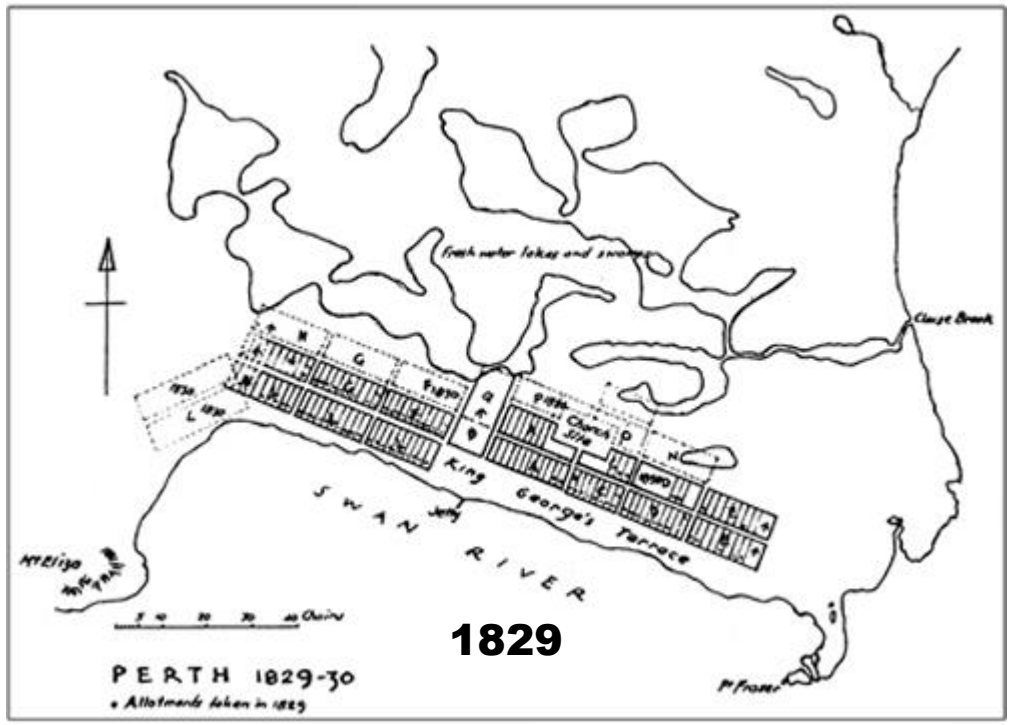
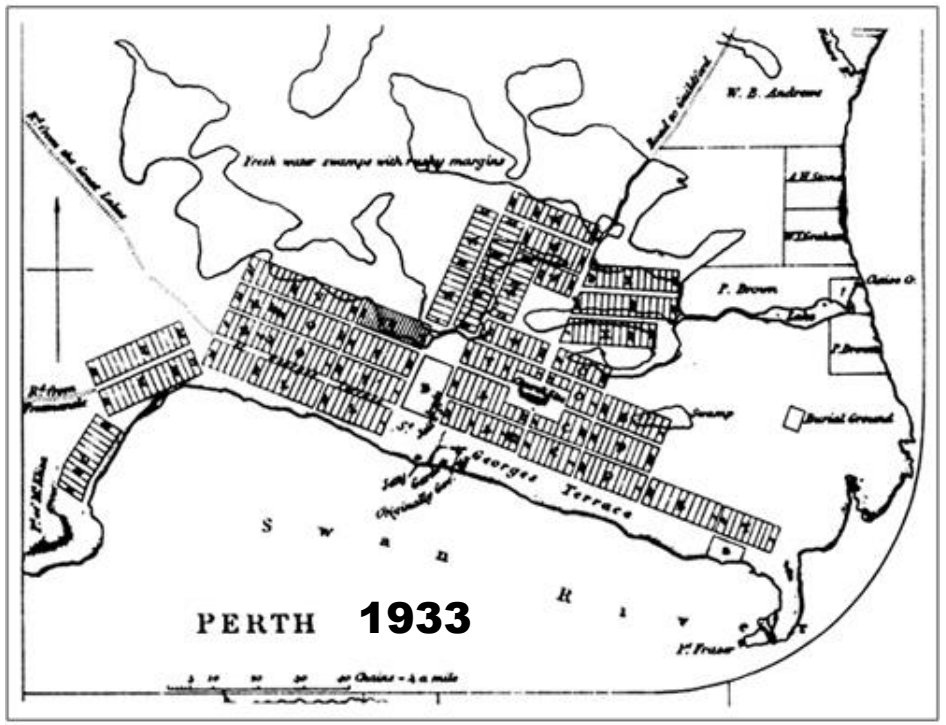


1829



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The first survey was completed in 1829, but was not published in its entirety until 1833. The plan was a semi-regular grid pattern bounded by Mount Eliza to the west, wetlands to the north, and tilted on an angle so that the principal streets ran parallel to the river, which formed the boundary to the south and the east. Stirling's instructions had been to orientate the streets towards the cardinal points of the compass, probably to take advantage of the western sea breeze. Roe, however, chose to run them parallel to the river, a decision some regard as a mistake. To this day the presence of windy conditions in the central city continues to be a problem.

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The basis of the 1829 plan was to have three principal streets parallel to the river, and three running north–south through the existing swamps. Along the length of the river bank ran a long, broad street that was to become the main thoroughfare - St Georges Terrace. It was 99 feet wide, the standard width for a main street in colonial planning. Stretching northwards from the center was another wide street - Stirling Street - that was to be the principal axis for northern expansion of the city. A large open space between St Georges Terrace and the river allowed for recreational pursuits and reflected Stirling's intention that Perth was to be the administrative centre of the colony. However, demand from speculators would lead to the subdivision and sale of land to the south of the Terrace.

The plan centered on a large open space between Barrack and Pier Streets that was to contain a barracks and parade ground. The land to the west of the barracks was intended for trade and commerce, and in fact remains today as the commercial and financial center of the state economy. To the east of the barracks was the Government domain. Stirling Square was marked out and set aside for a botanic garden. It became a small park, however and King's Park was retained for the display of native flora.

Building regulations were published with the goal of creating an environment where the buildings had an air of gentility and respectability. Allotments along the most prestigious streets were granted strictly on the basis of social standing. This was done before general applications from settlers could be made. The Town Plan also employed a style of zoning and regulation that marked different blocks for different classes of occupants.

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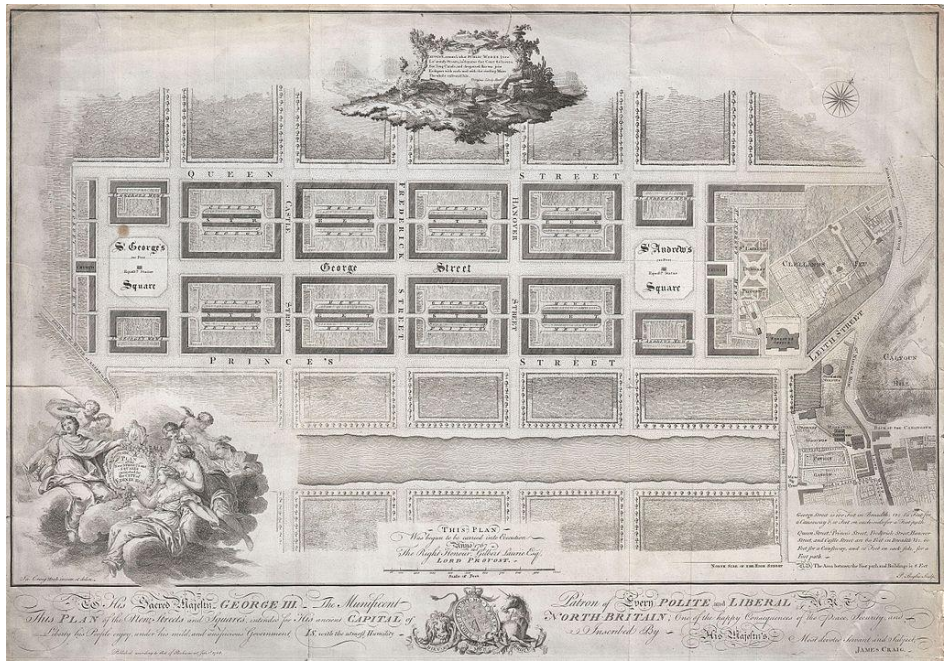

As much of the remaining land turned out to be quite sandy and unsuitable for agriculture, the first reports of the colony were not as glowing as Stirling had been led to expect. These reports, along with the difficulty of clearing land to grow crops, was a factor in the slow growth of Perth during the first two decades. Agriculture developed away from Perth in places like the Avon Valley, and along the southwest coastline. Transport in the early years was primarily along the coastline and river system, and one of the earliest projects was the construction of a 280-metre (920 ft) canal creating Burswood Island. Two years later, in 1833, the first dirt track between Perth and Fremantle was cut through the bush. Other tracks from the towns to the districts of Canning, Kelmscott, Guildford and Mandurah followed. The first bridge was the causeway across the Swan River, little more than a primitive timber bridge, but connecting what are now the suburbs of East Perth and Victoria Park.

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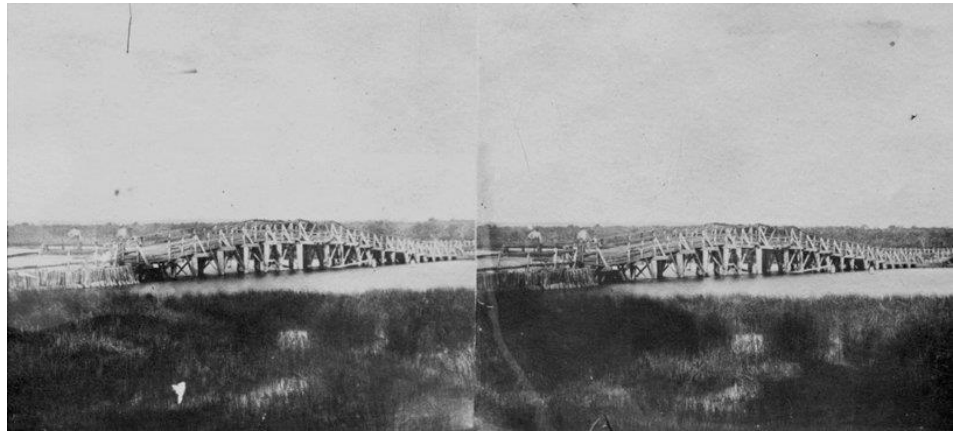
Early building activity laid the administrative, institutional and social foundations of colonial society. In 1831 the Round House was completed, providing the colony with its first prison; the Court House was opened in December 1836, doubling as place of worship until St George's Church was built in 1842. This wasn't the first church however; that honour goes to the All Saints Church in the Swan Valley, north-east of Perth, completed in 1841. The colony's first brewery, Swan Brewery, was established at the corner of Spring Street and Mounts Bay Road, near the base of Mount Eliza in Perth.

Relations between the Europeans and local Aboriginal peoples were not always amicable, and sometimes resulted in violent skirmishes. On 11 July 1833, a senior warrior named Yagan, of the local Aboriginal tribe near the Swan River, was murdered after a bounty was issued for his capture following the slaying of a couple of settlers.
By 1850, the population of the colony of Western Australia had increased to 5886, while the population around Perth was still only about 1940, approximately equal with that of Fremantle.



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In 1849, after a decade and half of meagre growth, Perth became a penal colony and in the next 16 years received an influx of nearly 10,000 convicts; by the time transportation ceased in 1868, convicts outnumbered free settlers 9,700 to 7,300. This significantly changed the social and economic dynamics of the colony. The convicts were involved in the construction of a large amount of infrastructure and this shaped the character of the city.

Perth's early buildings had been rudimentary and simple, however with the arrival of labour in the form of a convict workforce, new buildings of colonial authority arose. These embraced the culture and aspirations of Empire in a remote settlement, and were largely constructed in the Gothic style so much in vogue in England at the time. Constructed of locally harvested clay bricks, mellow in colour and soft in texture, the public architecture of the colony was relatively small-scale as befitting a new settlement.

Buildings constructed during this time include the Fremantle Prison, Government House, the Perth Town Hall, The Cloisters, Perth Gaol, and the Swan River Mechanics' Institute.

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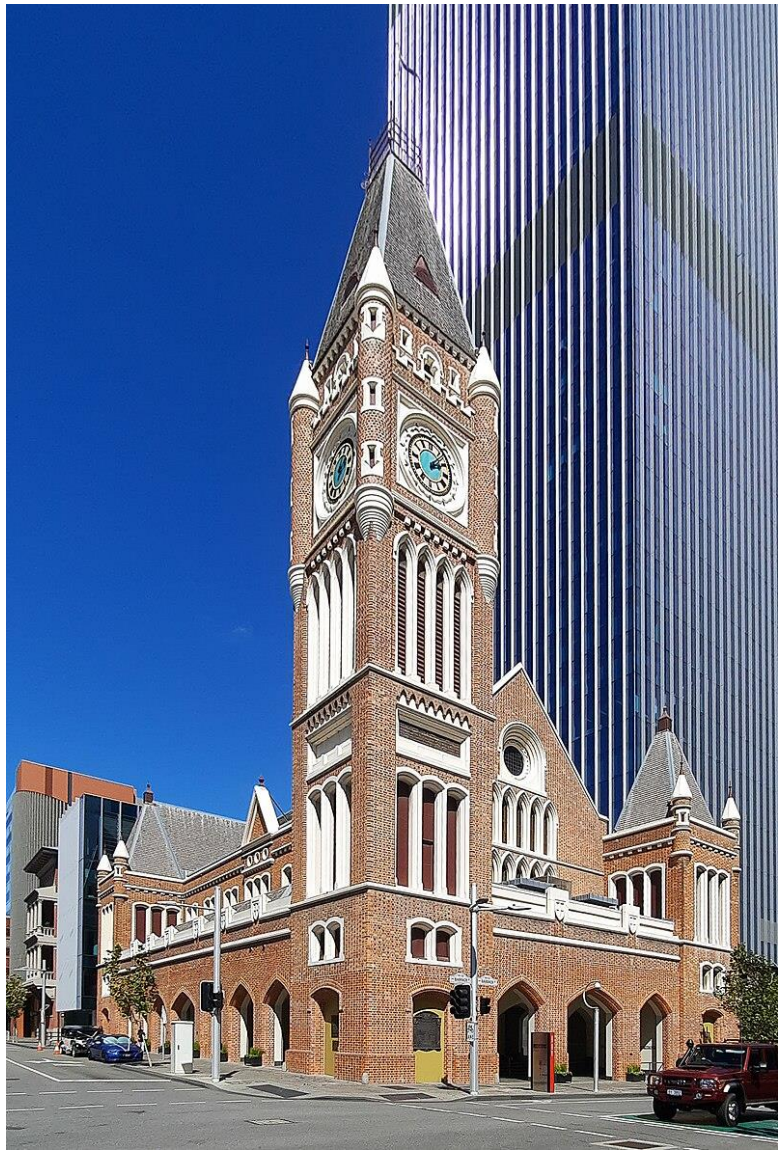

The convict workforce led to an improvement in the prospects of the colony, however Perth's underlying identity as a remote and rustic frontier town remained unchanged. Despite being proclaimed a city by Queen Victoria in 1856, fourteen years later a Melbourne journalist described Perth

a quiet little town of some 3000 inhabitants spread out in straggling allotments down to the water's edge, intermingled with gardens and shrubberies and half rural in its aspect ... The main streets are macadamised, but the outlying ones and most of the footpaths retain their native state from the loose sand – the all pervading element of Western Australia – productive of intense glare or much dust in the summer and dissolving into slush during the rainy season.

This village-like atmosphere of scattered single and two story brick or stone residences, surrounded by gardens, remained unchanged until the 1880s and 1890s.

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The latter half of the nineteenth century, and in particular the last two decades, saw Perth begin to grow for the first time in a significant way. In 1877, a telegraph line from Adelaide to Perth was completed, vastly improving intracontinental communication. This increased the growth of colonial media, such as the first weekly newspaper, the Western Mail, which commenced publishing in 1885.

Government architecture continued to shape the central city. In 1874 large and impressive government offices were constructed, housing the Cabinet, Treasury, Titles Office and Post Office. The business district developed slowly with a mix of shops and cottages to the west of Barrack Street. By the 1880s residential development had commenced in West Perth, while industrial development was concentrated in East Perth.

During this time two events significantly shaped the development of both central Perth and the wider metropolitan region: the construction of a railway from Fremantle to Guildford, completed in 1881, and the Western Australian gold rushes, commencing in 1885.
The discovery of gold in the Kimberley, Murchison and Kalgoorlie regions in the 1880s and 1890s, and the concurrent granting of responsible government to Western Australia in 1890 had a huge impact on the development of Perth.
The physical nature of the city changed dramatically with economic prosperity and the increase of population as a result of gold rush immigration. In one decade the population of the city tripled, from 8,447 in 1891 to 27,553 in 1901. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Perth was totally transformed. Its streets were lined with elaborately styled multi-storey buildings, many of which were designed by members of a now large architectural profession, and the population had spilled over into new suburbs that encircled the city.

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The location of the central Perth railway station had an enormous influence on the pattern and concentration of land uses within the city. With the railway line providing a boundary to the north, and the Government domain to the south, commercial and professional development was concentrated within the city's central axis, bounded by William and Barrack Streets. This development was highlighted by the opening of Western Australia's first department store, Boans, in 1895. Eventually, several department stores opened in this precinct, including Foy and Gibson, Aherns, Bon Marche, Myers and David Jones. This created a vibrant walkable district, accessible by public transport, that remains to this day.

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The population growth provided the impetus for the expansion of infrastructure, services, and facilities, although not necessarily fast enough to cater for growing demand. In 1893, electricity generation was made available to the city of Perth, and the suburban rail line was extended from Perth to Armadale in the same year. In 1898, the Perth Zoo opened.
In 1897, Fremantle Harbour was officially opened. The harbour provided access to the Swan River for larger vessels, made possible after blasting the rocky bar across the Swan River mouth and dredging under the guidance of the colony's Engineer-in-Chief, Charles Yelverton O'Connor. The completion of this project set the seal on Fremantle becoming and remaining the main harbour in Western Australia, finally supplanting Albany.

On 28 September 1899, the first electric tram services commenced, operated by Perth Electric Tramways Ltd, with services from East Perth along Hay Street to Milligan Street. The Perth Mint, on Hay Street in East Perth, opened the same yea

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